A Personal Perspective . . .

THE SSCF AND MSSTC PROGRAMS AT UT-AUSTIN

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Introduction

If your goal is to get some exposure to a variety of strategic-level, Army-related topics, and you desire interface with some of the Army's senior leaders while decompressing after your last assignment, then taking the Senior Service College Fellowship (SSCF) Program at the University of Texas-Austin (UT-Austin) is for you. If your goal is to get a master's degree and learn more about the corporate world with which we have to interact in our regular jobs, then the Master of Science in Science and Technology Commercialization (MSSTC) Program at UT-Austin is a good bet. Pursuing both programs concurrently offers a significantly enhanced learning experience; however, it requires a considerable amount of personal dedication and commitment and does not allow much time for decompressing or personal time.

SSCF Program

The SSCF Program is 10 months long. It begins in August and ends with graduation in May of each year. The program offers senior lieutenant colonels/colonels and GS-14/15 (or equivalent personnel demonstration broadband level) civilians the opportunity to complete the Army's highest level of military education, equivalent to that granted from the Army War College designated as Military Education Level 1. The academic focus is a study of the relationships among national security policies and processes, emerging technologies of interest to the Army, and the industrial policy and base. The curriculum affords students an opportunity to participate in a well-organized training program that provides and broadens senior leadership perspectives on important Army strategic-level topics such as leadership, warfighting, lessons learned, organization, and structure.

Throughout the year, students have the opportunity at UT-Austin to audit classes that fall into their areas of interest. Also, a wide range of guest speakers are brought in who are primarily general officers, members of the Senior Executive Service, or resident senior-level faculty at The University of Texas' Institute for Advanced Technology. The small class size permits one-on-one interaction with the guest speakers and the opportunity to discuss issues of interest to each student.

Field trips to such places as Fort Hood, TX, attendance at seminars, and visits to high-tech industries in the surrounding Austin area are interesting and informative. These visits typically include presentations by senior-level leaders who provide students with unique insights into current operations and planned activities.

Students are also given the opportunity to prepare a research paper on a topic of interest that, at the end of the year, is submitted to the Army War College, if military, or to the Acquisition Support Center—which reports to the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology—if civilian. This provides students with a unique opportunity to delve into a specific area of personal interest that has some applicability to a current Army or acquisition issue. The curriculum is purposely designed to provide ample time for the student to pursue other outside interests while participating in the SSCF Program. For many, this means

being able to catch up on some personal time with the family or decompressing from previous assignments.

MSSTC Program

This 12-month program ends in May of each year, which makes it possible to pursue this course of study concurrently with participation in the SSCF Program. The MSSTC Program is a rigorous academic program focused on giving students theory and practical experiences regarding how high-tech corporations really work to bring new technology from a concept stage into the marketplace. There is a heavy workload of individual and team deliverables required every 2 weeks including oral presentations, written reports, exams, and extensive reading assignments, and there are no semester breaks and very few holidays.

The majority of professors who teach this program have practical business experience including some who have started their own companies; therefore, the course of study is a combination of learning the theory and then putting it into practice through the assignments. Students get to work with high-tech inventions and learn what it takes to bring them to the marketplace. Throughout the year, significant emphasis is placed on learning what high-tech corporate "intrapreneurship" and entrepreneurship are all about, including how to perform technology assessments and how to market, finance, manage risk, and organize a new business venture for the greatest probability of success.

The MSSTC Program has a sister program that runs concurrently at the University of Adelaide in Australia. At the beginning of the school year, all in-class, online, Adelaide, and other foreign students from countries such as Mexico, Russia, Brazil, Taiwan, Singapore, and China attend an orientation where the overall program is explained, teams are organized, and some individual and team assessments are conducted. Each team is comprised of a mix of these students to participate as full-team members. This approach is designed to facilitate learning in a virtual team environment, which gives the program a definite international flavor to help students learn better what it takes to conduct business around the world and interface in other political and cultural environments. Some students take advantage of a one-time opportunity to go to Adelaide for 2 weeks to sit in on classes, interact with their Australian teammates, and investigate their selected technologies from an international perspective.

The demographics of the in-class students include a cross section of people from both the private and public sectors. Many of the students from the private sector either own their own businesses or work in high-tech corporations around the world. Public sector students have a different perspective, which greatly facilitates class discussion. In-class sessions are normally held every other Friday and Saturday in a global classroom where the students' laptops are connected to the UT network to facilitate in-class file exchanges and presentations. The global classroom is fitted with video teleconferencing (VTC) facilities, and all presentations are made using behind-the-screen projectors. Once a month, a VTC is conducted with the University of Adelaide. This usually involves guest lecturers either from Austin or Adelaide presenting information relevant to where the students are in the program.

Conclusion

The opportunity to attend the SSCF Program and/or the MSSTC Program at UT-Austin is definitely worth the time and effort required as they both provide excellent learning experiences and opportunities to pursue topics of personal interest. Both programs provide senior military personnel and civilians with unique opportunities to expand their knowledge base by gaining exposure to a variety of relevant Army and acquisition-related issues, the commercialization of high technology, and the operation of high-tech corporations. Individually, either of the programs is an excellent investment of time and effort, but taken together they provide a highly synergistic learning experience that leads to a significantly expanded view of the world we live in, both from military and industry perspectives. As previously pointed out, however, undertaking both programs concurrently requires a significant amount of individual commitment and leaves little time for personal activities.

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